2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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Chapter II

THE SHILLUK

The Shilluk country forms a narrow fringe on the west bank of the Nile, from Kaka in the north to within 30 miles of Lake No in the south. From Kodok to Taufikia the Shilluk also occupy the east bank, and their villages extend some 35 miles up the Sobat River, principally on the north bank. Theirs is the flat grass country, dry in the dry season, swampy in the wet, extending on both sides of the Nile; hence cattle are their wealth and principal care, and although a considerable quantity of millet is grown not enough is harvested to provide fully for the relatively dense population, and scarcity is by no means unusual. A census taken in 1903 gave a population of nearly 40,000, possessing over 12,000 head of cattle and nearly 64,000 sheep and goats. No doubt the number of cattle returned was unduly low, but, making all allowances, the Shilluk are poorer in cattle than are the Dinka. The 1903 figure is far below that suggested by Schweinfurth (1,200,000), and at the present time it is likely that the Shilluk number some 100,000.

We have stated in Chapter I that in our opinion the homeland of the Shilluk-speaking tribes lay to the east of Lake Victoria. We have no historical record of a northerly movement, all we can say is that a series of migrations gave rise to a number of tribes speaking Shilluk dialects in what is now the Bahr el Ghazal Province, and that from one of these, the Luo, the Shilluk nation of history originated.

The researches of the Rev. Father Hofmayr of the Austrian Mission[1] indicate that the Luo—the Shilluk-speaking "Jur"—of the Bahr el Ghazal Province represent the remains of what was once a greater Luo people, from whom are derived the present Shilluk nation, or, more accurately, a certain number of their leading families including that of the king. Here in the neighbourhood of the present Luo country, the land of Dimo of the legends, Nyakang—the leader, culture-hero, and first king of the Shilluk—lived with his half-brother's son, Dimo, until the enmity of the latter drove Nyakang and his followers to seek fresh homes to the east and so brought into existence

[1] Wilhelm Hofmayr, *Die Schilluk. Geschichte, Religion und Leben eines Nilneger-Stammes*, Wien, 1925.

2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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grouped together in battle, and still eat together ceremoniously, e.g. at mourning feasts. The *kwanyivek* have their foreheads scarred in the same manner as commoners. Lines of scar marks are also made on the breast, across the shoulder blade, and two rectangular masses above the umbilicus; these are considered to have no tribal significance but are done for the sake of adornment and are said to be admired by the opposite sex.

We are indebted to Mr. Heasty for a note on Shilluk customs, which seem to indicate that the milk avoidances of the Nilotes are dependent on fear of contamination associated with the sexual act.

A young woman does not drink milk under any circumstances, though a woman who is nursing a baby may, as do old women past the reproductive age. Only small boys herd the cattle and milk them, for once a boy has reached maturity there is the danger that he may have had sexual contact, when if he milked, or handled manure, or even walked among the cattle in their pens, he would cause them to become sterile. These beliefs are held so strongly that a child who goes to his neighbours to drink milk must have a bath before he returns home, lest milk might adhere to him, be mixed with food, and be eaten by someone who was unclean. If a man has had sexual relations with his wife or another he is considered unclean and does not drink milk until the sun has set the following day. Mr. Heasty could not discover that anyone objected to drinking milk drawn by himself, nor does anyone avoid taking milk and meat together. The pottery vessels used for milk are not used for any other purpose.

A woman cooks for her husband and leaves the hut while he eats, but it is not shameful for men and women to be seen eating together, and after a man has eaten the main part of a meal a woman and her friends, usually her unmarried *nyiwa* (if her *gal* is not distant), may sit and eat while he continues his meal. A newly married couple do not eat together. Small reed mats called *paro* are used to put over pots of food to keep off flies and dust, and out of respect a woman might stand one of these upright to screen her face while eating or drinking.

PLATE IX

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Dum-bird ceremony, sacrificial bull at shrine of Nyakang

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Fundang, shrine to Deng

(See p. 88

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

221 weighty ceremonies, in order to keep the crocodiles away; this forms an im-
233 portant part of the duties of the witch-doctor; *vide* page 172. All the youths and boys over ten years accompany the herds, leaving their homes for several weeks or even months, and enjoying the free life in temporary huts. When after the
578 first rains the new grass springs up, they return home. The struggle for the best pasture grounds very often becomes the cause of bitter quarrels, and has in the past not unfrequently led to tribal wars.

231 GOATS The Shilluk goats have rather high legs, they almost invariably look thin and not well fed; their colour is mostly grey, but black ones too are not un-
SHEEP frequent. The sheep have no wool, but hair. They have a kind of mane on shoulder, neck and breast, the rest of the body being covered with short hair.
FOWLS Most sheep are white, brown-white, or black-white. — A race of small fowls is kept, but the natives do not make much of them; many chickens are stolen
DOGS by snakes and other small animals. — Dogs are very numerous, they are a kind of greyhound, of red or yellow colour, and have a black, long snout. They are exceedingly quick in running and most clever in jumping. They overtake gazelles with easiness, and are much used in hunting.

224 HUNTING Hunting is practised by all men occasionally, but is, as a rule, not very
[411] successful. They use spears, clubs, and traps in killing or catching animals. Sometimes, chiefly in procuring animals whose skins form part of the revenue of the king, all the people of a village assemble for a hunting match, *vide* page 125; a large circle is formed, and the animals inside it, when wishing to escape, are killed. When an animal is wounded, but runs away, they will persecute it for
[647] days, till it breaks down. The skin of a killed leopard belongs to the king, and could, at least formerly, be worn by private only by special permission of the king. A lion's skin is considered as evil, and is not worn.

225 Hippopotamus hunting is done by combined parties in canoes, harpooning the animal and dispatching him with spears, when he comes to the surface to breathe.

226 FISHING Their way of fishing is that with the round barbed spear, and with traps, which are made of corn stalks and reed. Fish-spearing is done in muddy water, where they cannot see anything below the surface, and therefore cannot aim. But nevertheless by this rude mode they sometimes have good results, the fish in the White Nile and Sobat being numerous and large. Sometimes they carry on fishing during the night time by holding burning grass-torches over the
[177] water, and thus enticing the fish, which are then speared. In recent time nets and fishhooks are bought from the white people, and are employed in fishing.

463 HANDICRAFTS The Shilluks practise a great number of crafts, which are carried on in families for generations, the father and mother imparting their skill to their children.

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

here articles of purchase and sale are calculated in silver currency.

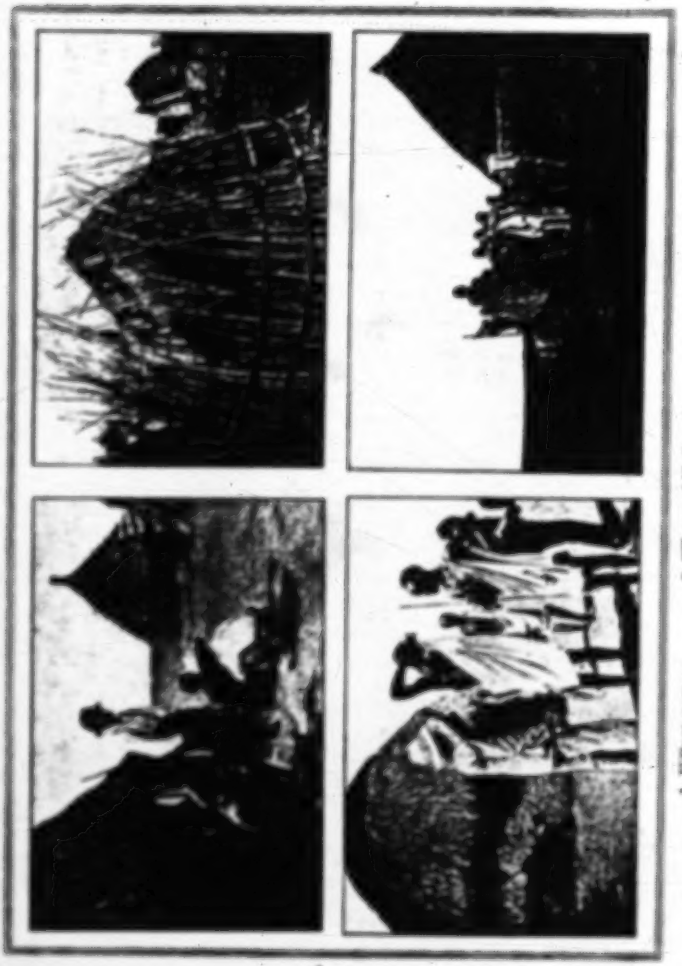
The daily work of the women is cooking, carrying water, cleaning the house and yard, etc. During the time of farmwork they help the men in cultivating the fields.

FOOD The staple food is dura. It is cooked, baked into a bread (*kuge*), roasted, brewed and, when green, eaten raw. For different kinds of food vide page 109. Their diet is rather monotonous, dura being its constant chief component. The dura is pounded and ground. The mortar is either a log of wood hollowed out, or a flat excavation in the ground, lined out with clay. The mill-stones — a large and a small one, with the latter the grinding is done — are sourced from districts west of the Shilluk country. — Fire is made by twirling a hard stick on a soft piece of wood.

Besides dura they eat sesame, durra, maize, beans, some onions, various grass seeds, the seeds of the lotus plant and of some kinds of nymphaeae. The fruit of several trees, as *dolaib*, *nabag*, etc. also serve as food; they even rob ant hills to procure the winter store of hoarded seeds. White ants, when in the winged state, are a delicacy to them. — Milk is used in the household in many ways: it is drunk fresh, sour, or boiled, or dura meals are prepared with it. They also make butter, by shaking or rolling the milk in a gourd. — As domestic animals are almost never slain, meat forms no part of the daily food, but is rather an exceptional delicacy, which is, however, sought for with eagerness; of game they hardly leave any piece uneaten, skin and bowels not excepted; they do not even despise dead animals. The blood of killed animals is kept and cooked, but they do not tap the blood from living cattle, as is the custom with the Bari and Mani. — Generally they prefer the meat of castrated animals.

Two chief meals are taken daily; one from nine to ten in the morning, and the second at sunset.

BREWING OF BEER A large quantity of the dura the people reap is used in cooking merisa or beer. The grain is put into jars and water poured on it. Then it is left till the grain begins to sprout. Then it is spread in the sun to dry, and then pounded or ground; this wet meal is mixed with flour from the fresh grain and put a second time into jars which are filled with water. After stirring and mixing well, a little dry meal is sprinkled on it; the jars are covered with small mats and allowed to remain a day or two, until it begins to ferment, when a little more water and meal are added. When the whole mass is well fermented it is filtered through a grass funnel, and the following day is ready for use. It will keep about a week. Though this drink is slightly intoxicating, it does not seem to do great harm; it is very nourishing, and the natives regard it rather as a food than a beverage.



1. Village scene 2. "House of Ryiking" 3. A Shilluk giant
4. Typical group of Shilluks; bodies covered with ashes; at the left a Shilluk dog

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[Facing p. 42]

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

233 [492] Tribal custom forbids the Shulla from riding upon a donkey, so he never possesses one. Cattle are never used for draught or carrying purposes, so he has no beasts of burden, and perhaps never will so long as women are plentiful.

• 231 [262] The villages are full of hunting dogs. Unlike the Nuers and most of the Dinkas the Shulla raise chickens. They are a degenerate Mediterranean strain. Eggs are eaten only by women and children.

Animal life must be well guarded and carefully housed at night most of the year. If an animal loiters on the river bank it most likely becomes the food of a crocodile. If one strays off into the woods it probably becomes the prey of a hyena, leopard or lion. Myriads of flies and numerous varieties of ticks also prey upon the flocks and herds, tormenting them by night as well as by day, and transmit the germs of various diseases also. Texas or tick fever is nearly always present, and a trypanosome not so fatal as the one of dreaded tsetse fly is also prevalent. The plague is a frequent visitor too and the mouth and foot diseases often attack the cattle toward the close of the dry season. The annual loss from all these enemies of animal life is very heavy, but as no females, unless barren, are ever killed for food or sold, and grass is plentiful, on the whole there is an increase in the number of live stock raised.

241 [797 1777] As to the possibilities of agriculture in the Shulla land obstacles to be overcome have been mentioned. What the mission has done shows that many varieties of fruits and a considerable number of vegetables may be grown. Future generations may have lumber, if the right varieties of forest trees are planted. Cotton is not a sure rain crop, but with irrigation it has few enemies. Sugar-cane and rice can be grown in favorable places. The soil of this part of the Sudan is not generally deep, is deficient in nitrogen and very poor in humus. Nitrogen may be restored with legumes, but the humus problem is difficult, for the white ants devour very quickly all manure, mulch etc. spred upon the ground.

243 The Shulla in sticking to the one main crop of dura has after all adopted the grain which is naturally adapted to the soil and climate and yields best to his methods of farming.

5. Foods and food-stuffs.

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kwɔ́n a kind of dura-bread or mush.
àkʃíʃ́ a food of dura.
àpʃ́áʃ́ a food of dura.
àríyʃ́ a food of dura (prepared after Arab fashion).
àdʃ́íʃ́ a food of dura (prepared after Arab fashion).
mɲíaŋ́r a food of dura with fat, eaten without anything else.
mʃ́kɔ́bʃ́tí a common dura-food.

11: Oyler M-5 (ca. 1918)1919 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

All the evil medicine men keep snakes, but usually they have them in a gourd or den in the fields, though a few of the most powerful have kept the snakes in their houses. To deceive the people, they pretend to fear snakes. 231 754

A man, who is reliable, tells this story of a transaction he witnessed. He was making a short trip. He came to a village where the people were very much excited. He found that the cause of the trouble was that a sick man said he had been bewitched by an evil medicine man named Akomadul. Poor Akomadul was brought into the centre of the village, and beaten by all of the people, until at last he cried out: «Do not kill me, I did it, but I will save him. I will remove the charm I have put on him.» Akomadul then went into the house of the sick man, and took out a bit of hollow ambach wood that had been hidden in the grass of the roof. Inside of it were, a charm, an egg, and a lizard. The people were not satisfied, and they began to beat him again. He then went to the field of the afflicted man, and got a charm that had been buried there. It was a large stick with an iron ring at each end, and stretched between the rings was a lizard. He next went to the doorway of the patient, and took up a cooking vessel that had been buried there. The vessel was full of charms, eggs, and lizards. The chief of the village asked him why he wanted to kill the man, and he said: «He cured me because I killed one of his relatives». Akomadul then took a white sheep, and said: «I will save the man». The sheep was cut open while yet alive, and the contents of the stomach were put on the patient, and on his house. The blood was put in the hole where the cooking vessel had been buried. He then said: «The man will get well; even though you kill me, he will recover». The people wanted to kill the witch, but the chief intervened to save his life. It was reported that the man recovered after a long illness. 754 683

It can easily be seen that many ills can readily be diagnosed as coming from an evil medicine man. When the good medicine man has found that the malady was caused by an evil medicine man, he proceeds to break the charm. Different methods are used, but one or two will suffice. While the medicine man is working, the parents of the patient pray for him, if they are living. In case they are dead, his male relatives pray for him. The patient sits on the ground while the healer jumps over him in such a way as 755

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PLATE 18. Meanwhile an ox had been tethered near the drums, and a warrior stood by, spear in hand, ready for the sacrifice.

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PLATE 19. After several minutes of dancing, the crowd moved forward and knelt before the tomb.

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

narrow circular hole in the ground about a foot deep, and steadily pounded with a heavy, six-foot pole wielded with all the strength a young pair of arms and shoulders can bring to the task. The coarse flour which results from this operation is soaked in water and then ground again, this time between two hard, rough stones. The flour is ready for use; it is mixed with water and boiled in a shallow iron dish to make a thick porridge, and this, flavoured with a little salt if that is available, and mixed with a little milk, constitutes the meal. Young women, however, are denied the luxury of milk, unless they are nursing a baby.

By the time the women have returned from the river, ground the flour and cooked the porridge, it is already nine o'clock. If it is the dry season and there is no work to be done in the fields, the men have been sitting around since sunrise busy perhaps with some task such as making a grass rope or weaving a fish trap, or merely gossiping away the time until their food is ready. When a woman has cooked her husband's breakfast she takes it into the living hut, and then leaves while he eats. She never eats with him, though she may return later, before he has finished, and eat her own meal sitting apart; she may also join other women and eat with them. When breakfast is over the men resume their tasks, and if there is a nice part of the river bank shaded with trees, such as is to be found at Detwok, they will take their rope making and weaving materials or their fishing net and pass the day there pleasantly enough. The young boys untether the bleating sheep and goats which pour out of the village running in search of grass and water, followed by their herds who add to the din by yelling and whistling; the cattle follow at a more leisurely pace in charge of the older boys. Soon the village is empty of animals save for the mangy, half-starved dogs nosing about for scraps of food, and the scraggy chickens picking up grains of millet scattered here and there in the compound. The little girls appear, staggering under the weight of the fat babies they carry on their hips. The women and the older girls go about the never-ending household tasks, cleaning up after their untidy menfolk,

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

583 586 686 797 break up a Christian family in that manner, and that if the woman and children were not returned to their home within three days, the matter would be taken to the king. Happily we were on safe ground in threatening this. A short time before there had been a similar case in Lul where a Christian family was concerned and the Fathers had protested successfully to the king, who ordered the family to be returned. The chief, hearing this, gave in gracefully and the woman and children were brought back.

583 602 And what of the happy father of the bride? Does he assume the airs and authority of a cattle baron at thus being enriched by ten cows? Poor old father, alas, will be fortunate if he gets one or two of the dowry to call his own. He does, indeed, as befitting his dignity as head of the family, receive the cattle, but the same family will take very good care that they do not remain long in the paternal shippon. He probably has growing sons hungry for cattle to build up their own dowries, but if it should happen that the Lord has not blessed him with male issue, his own unmarried brothers will clamour for their share; his wife's strident voice will be heard advancing the claims of her brothers; uncles and nephews and in-laws will take up the cry, some in strong, others in less certain terms according to their proximity to or remoteness from the immediate family circle, and the dispute will continue until the final settlement is made and the cows are dispersed to the remotest parts of the land. One thing is sure, and that is that if anyone suffers from the division of the spoils it will be father. In the course of a ● 231 few years the cattle of a dowry will have changed hands several times, having been split up and absorbed into other herds, again and again handed over as part of a bride-price, and again and again finding new owners among some girl's relatives, ranging the length and breadth of the Shilluk country and back again, shifting and changing, being collected and dispersed, only to be collected and dispersed again. And so it will go on until an individual cow is deemed no longer worthy of inclusion in a dowry, when it will be sold for butcher's meat or slaughtered for a wedding or a

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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funeral or some such occasion calling for special feasting. 231
It would tax the ingenuity of a European to devise a system, and keep a battery of clerks in constant employment and a filing cabinet in constant use to keep an up-to-date check on the wanderings of the various animals of any one bride-herd. Not so with the simple Shilluk however. Inside his woolly [181] head—admittedly not particularly concerned with anything that does not pertain to cattle—he keeps all the details of each individual cow in his herd. He knows all their comings in and goings out, all their risings up and their sittings down. Each cow has a special and distinctive colour and each colour a special and distinctive name and he knows them all and can describe them in detail. He can tell you offhand the life history of any cow; its previous owners as it passed from dowry to dowry eventually to become a member of his, and when he has parted with it, he follows its subsequent career with unflagging interest, can name the various people who have had it since it left his ownership and knows just where it can be found at any given time.

Our young benedict is now happily married and settled 593
down to a life of connubial bliss. But among the Shilluk, as among their more sophisticated Western brethren, the course of true love does not always run smooth. The lady, who in the eyes of her lord is a mere chattel, something that he has bargained and paid for, must prove that she is up to standard. [562]
Not indeed that a Shilluk wife becomes the absolute slave of her husband, bearing all the burdens of the day and the heats, while he passes the rest of his days in slothful idleness. Far from it. Both have their recognized duties and one will [462]
assist the other should occasion call for it; thus the wife will at times assist her husband with the planting, weeding and reaping, whilst he does not consider it beneath his dignity to nurse the baby while his spouse is making the daily trip to the river for water, or to sit for hours monotonously agitating a gourd of milk in the hope that eventually it will turn into butter. But the primary duty of a Shilluk wife is to become a 586
Shilluk mother, and if perchance she proved to be barren

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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Whatever the cause of death, burial follows at once except in the case of a king, when there is a short lying in state. If the deceased is a Nyireth or a chief, he is buried under the floor of his principal hut. A bull is killed, the meat of which is eaten by the grave-diggers, whilst the skin is cut into strips and woven across a quickly fashioned wooden, four-legged frame to make a bed or a bier. The body is washed and the head shaved. Arms, neck and waist are adorned with beads and a leopard skin fastened round the loins. The corpse is then rolled in a new white cloth and around this is bound a cow skin. It is then placed on the bed with a hen under the head. Meanwhile the work of digging the grave has been going on apace. This is a very difficult task, particularly in the dry season when the ground is as hard as concrete. The pit made is a very large one, since it has to accommodate the complete bier. It is taken down to a depth of six or seven feet and then a large cavity is cut in the side, large enough to contain the bed. The body resting on the bier is then lowered into the grave and fitted into the cavity. As this is being done the wailing of the women fills the air and the men salute the dead prince or chief, clashing their spears on their shields and singing songs in his praise. The principal wife takes two handfuls of sweepings from the floor and, standing with her back to the grave, throws them over her shoulders into the grave. Then she casts in two handfuls of mud, again standing with her back to the grave but with her hands by her sides, so that she throws the mud behind her. After the grave is filled in, all the mourners wash themselves in the river. They wear ropes round their necks as a sign of mourning, shave their heads and remove all beads and ornaments, and during the period of mourning should abstain from dancing. Four days after the burial the mourners gather again for the completion of the grave. Beer has been prepared and some if it is poured on the grave; the mound is then plastered over with mud and neatly smoothed and finished off. A short funeral dance follows after which all the mourners partake of the remainder of the beer.

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

person is a woman or a girl, a skirt is substituted for the skin, and for the girl some strings of yellow beads are added. If the family can afford it, it will buy a couple of yards of white cotton cloth to serve as a winding sheet and a cow skin is bound round this. The grave of a commoner is not dug in the hut itself but outside, near the compound. It is put near the surrounding reed fence, in a place where passers-by will not walk over it. As for a chief, the grave is excavated to a depth of about six feet but it is not nearly so wide, since the body is not buried lying on a bier, but is placed on the bare earth. The niche or alcove is cut out of the side, however, and a hen is placed under the head. During the funeral the mourners wail in the customary manner, and this is the signal for the warriors, who hitherto have been out of sight in the cattle byre, to charge forward, armed as usual with spears and shields, to salute their dead comrade. The grave is mudded over on the fourth day with the customary beer drinking and libation over the grave, and the relatives abstain for a while from dancing and the use of personal adornments.

The mourning is not really completed, however, until the deceased person has been commemorated at a funeral dance. This is a strict obligation upon the relatives, even though it may be a year or more before it is fulfilled. Since the commoner is not sufficiently important or wealthy to be given a dance all to himself, funeral dances are held periodically in the principal villages. The district turns up in force for these communal 'All Souls' days, for besides the attraction of the dance—and any Shilluk will cheerfully walk miles just for the pleasure of a dance—there is also the extra treat of a share in the meat when the affair is over. Everybody who is commemorating his dead must give an offering, a bull if the deceased is a man or a woman, a sheep if a child. The dance follows the pattern of the more important funeral dances. There is no tomb, however, so the drums mounted in forked sticks are made the focus of attention. The warriors, armed with spear and shield, make the customary encirclement of the village and then advance to the drums, chanting their